

On the Transition from Bengali to Maithili in the Nepalese Dramas of the 16th and 17th Centuries

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Among New Indo-Aryan languages Maithili developed relatively early into a literary language of a high standard and Maithili literature had already reached a sort of climax in the 14th and 15th centuries, a period for which two poets particularly are highly esteemed, i. e. Jyotirīśvara and the very famous Vidyāpati. In the following centuries the use of Maithili as a literary language expanded into the neighbouring countries of Bengal, Orissa, Assam and finally also Nepal. One reason for this expansion was certainly the flight of Maithili Pandits from their homeland to the east and north in order to escape the iconoclastic onset of the Muslims, who were expanding their territory more and more into the Eastern parts of Northern India. But this would have been true also e.g. for the Bengal Pandits. After all, Maithili became known in the neighbouring countries, but there must also have been other reasons for the expansion, particularly of Maithili, which must be linked to a special quality or certain specific features of the Maithili language or literature.

Recently, W. L. Smith published an article about his comparative studies of Assamese Vrajāvalī, Bengali Brajabuli and Old Maithili.¹ Therein he made clear that, on the one hand, the Assamese poet Śaṅkaradeva used Maithili - "somewhat simplified and streamlined", as the author states - and did not use a 'Mischsprache' previously called Vrajāvalī, and that, on the other hand, the older lyrics from Bengal which had generally been ascribed to the corresponding 'Mischsprache' Brajabuli is to be counted as Maithili as well. For the use of Maithili in Non-Maithila countries Smith pointed out the following main reasons:

- First, he qualified Old Maithili as "most attractive" being an extraordinarily " 'sweet' language" with a highly appreciated "mellifluousness" so that it was "considered more pleasant to the ear than either Assamese or Bengali".
- Secondly, he ascribed a "sacred status" to Old Maithili on account of its "increasingly closer association with Krishna literature."²

¹ "Brajabuli, Vrajāvalī and Maithili" in Mirja Juntunen, William L. Smith & Carl Suneson, eds., *Sauhṛdyamaṅgalam: Studies in Honour of Siegfried Lienhard on his 70th Birthday*, The Association of Oriental Studies, Stockholm, 1995.

² At least, this argument is valid for Bengal where the members of the Kṛṣṇaite Caitanya movement were eager to emulate the Maithili poet Vidyāpati. The Viṣṇuites of Assam, however, who used Maithili were notoriously more prudish and therefore could not have had Vidyāpati as their particular model. Cf. W. L. Smith, "Śaṅkaradeva's Vrajāvalī Vocabulary" in the present volume, p. 80.

- And thirdly, what he called the "key factor" was "Maithili's great stature as a literary language". "By 1500, fifty years after Vidyapati's death, Maithili as a highly sophisticated language with an impressive literature". Thus Smith summarized: "Maithili had sophistication and prestige, it was sweet to the ear and largely intelligible. This proved a combination difficult to resist."

My theme, however, is the question of why Maithili was taken over at that time, particularly in Nepal, and I shall come back to Smith's arguments later on in this article. First, however, something should be said about Nepal, i. e. the Nepal Valley,³ of that time. First of all we must keep in mind an important difference to the other above-mentioned neighbouring countries of Mithila: the languages of Bengal, Assam and Orissa are together with Maithili of Indo-Aryan origin and relatively close to the Mithila language⁴ so that it may be supposed that Maithili was intelligible there at least among the educated strata. The Nepal Valley, on the other hand, was at that time - and is still partly so today - a Newari-speaking area, i.e. it belonged to the Tibeto-Burmese language area. The reasons why Maithili was nevertheless introduced as a literary language into the Valley in the beginning of the 17th century and intensely cultivated for about one and a half centuries, can be specified for Nepal much more definitely than is the case for Assam and Bengal.

In the epoch I am concerned with, the Nepal valley was ruled by the Malla dynasty. The founder of this royal lineage was Sthitirājamalla, whose origin is unknown. He succeeded in usurping the control over the country during a period of political confusion by the end of the 14th century, though the claim of power of Malla rulers could only be called politically consolidated under his grandson Yakṣamalla around the middle of the 15th century. After his death the valley was distributed to his three sons and during the whole so-called late Malla period, i. e. from about the end of the 15th up to the 18th century, the Nepal Valley was divided into the three small kingdoms of Bhaktapur, Patan (also called Lalitpur) and Kathmandu. In all these three town-kingdoms members of the Malla dynasty ruled uninterruptedly throughout this particularly flourishing period in the cultural history of Nepal, which abruptly ended only in 1768 when troops from Gorkha marched in under the command of Prthvī Nārāyaṇa of the Śāha dynasty, which has been ruling the Nepal kingdom until today. One facet of the mentioned cultural flourishing during the late Malla period is an amazingly high number of dramas from about the middle of the 16th century onwards: more than 150 dramas have come down to us in the form of manuscripts. These dramas were mainly written in New Indo-Aryan languages, particularly in Maithili and Bengali,

³ Nepal here means particularly what is today known as the Kathmandu Valley. Traditionally this small part of today's Nepal was specifically referred to by the name of *nepālamaṇḍala* (cf. M. S. Slusser, *Nepal Mandala*, Princeton 1982, vol. 1, p. 7).

⁴ Though Maithili is normally counted as a Hindi dialect it is also true that it has certain structural elements in common with the Indo-Aryan languages of northeast India; cf. e. g. C.P. Masica, *The Indo-Aryan Languages*, Cambridge 1991, pp. 446-463: Appendix II: Schemes of NIA Subclassification.

and only relatively few are in the native Newari language.

Scholarly research on this dramatic literature, which began in 1891 with A. Conrady's edition of a mixed Bengali-Maithili drama from the 17th century,⁵ was continued afterwards only very sporadically⁶ and has not yet been able to provide a fairly clear idea about the history of the Nepalese dramas. Specifically, with respect to the selection and the use of the different languages mentioned, this research has failed to give distinct patterns for the criteria of choice or any discernible developments within the dramatic tradition. The reason for this is quite obvious, since until recently we have only known of relatively few dramas from the late Malla time, and this limited knowledge did not allow far-reaching conclusions concerning developments in dramatic history. Furthermore it is conspicuous that the production of dramatic texts has been seen almost exclusively under literary aspects, i. e. more or less without references to extra-literary circumstances or historical events. This is all the more remarkable since a considerable part of the said dramas were composed by the Malla kings themselves,⁷ a fact which could well hint to extra-literary motives lying behind the production of these dramatic pieces. Unfortunately, until today we also do not know much about the detailed political history of the three kingdoms of the Nepal valley during the late Malla period.

However, as far as the dramas themselves are concerned, the situation has recently changed. Since 1970 the Nepal-German Manuscript Preservation Project (NGMPP) has photographed many pertinent materials so that it is quite possible today to get an exhaustive insight without large-scale journeys to and stays in Nepal.⁸ I myself worked in the NGMPP in Kathmandu for a total of four years between 1979 and 1985, and among other things I kept an eye on the Nepalese dramas from the 14th to the 18th centuries. Only gradually did I succeed in getting a rough overview of the materials and clearer ideas about developments in the dramatic history of that time. Today, at least, I am able to present the following sequence of stages and developmental processes:

- The oldest dramas which were definitely composed in Nepal are from the 14/15th centuries. I know of a dozen such dramatic texts written in Sanskrit and the Prākṛit languages.⁹ The contents and form of these literary pieces show a distinct familiarity with the old-Indian dramatic tradition as well as

⁵ August Conrady, *Das Hariścandranṛityam. Ein altnepalesisches Tanzspiel*, Habilitationsschrift, Leipzig 1891

⁶ Cf. the references to the pertinent secondary literature in my book *The Pradyumna-Prabhāvatī Legend in Nepal*, Stuttgart 1987, p. 113-114 (notes).

⁷ That is, if we can rely on the statements given in the so-called Bhanitās of the dramatic songs in which the composers of the songs used to announce their respective names.

⁸ Copies of the films of that Nepalese-German joint venture (started in 1970) are located in the National Archives in Kathmandu and in the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Preußischer Kulturbesitz.

⁹ Among these are several dramas written by immigrant Maithilis as e. g. the *Bhairavānandanāṭaka* (ed. by Shriman Narain Dwivedi, Allahabad, no year, and two other plays by the author Maṇḍika).

with the Sanskrit Nāṭyaśāstra.

- One single dramatic text from the 15th century,¹⁰ however, was written in a sort of New Indo-Aryan language which is clear from the grammatical structure, though I am not yet able to specify and thus to identify the exact language.

- The next group of manuscripts contains six dramatic texts¹¹ which were unequivocally composed in the second half of the 16th century or at the very beginning of the 17th century, i. e. in any case before the reign of the Bhaktapur king Jagajjyotirmalla (1614-1637); they are uniformly written in Bengali. This finding was quite surprising to me. It means that at that time it was only Bengali which had the rank of a courtly literary language in Nepal. I do not know the special reasons for this fact, but the fact as such is evident from the documents.

- A further change, which we can even ascertain with some accuracy, has taken place in Bhaktapur during the reign of the above-mentioned king Jagajjyotirmalla. In any case the oldest Nepalese dramas written in Maithili which are known to me are all connected with his name and all the available evidence points to the assumption that it was this very Bhaktapur king by or under whom Maithili was introduced in place of Bengali as the new literary court language. The specific reasons for this innovation can be deduced up to a certain extent and will be discussed below:

The Bhaktapur king Jagajjyotirmalla was an educated and culturally interested scholar who read and wrote Sanskrit and, in addition to his literary productions, was also concerned with the Nāṭyaśāstra, the Kāmaśāstra, and the Saṃgītaśāstra. All his dramas which are known to me, however, are written in Maithili:

- Three plays have already been published, i. e. the *Muditakuvalayāśvanāṭaka* from 1628,¹² the *Haragaurīvivāhanāṭaka* from 1629,¹³ and the *Kuñjavihāra-*

¹⁰ This is a Rāmāyaṇa-play from N.S. 532 (A. D. 1412); the MS is from A. D. 1441 and has been filmed by the NGMPP under the reel No. B 15/16.

¹¹ The six dramas are the following:

- *Uṣāharaṇa*, written under Viṣṇusiṃha (1546-1556) of Patan, NGMPP reel No. B 276/16 (2nd part)
 - *Pārijātaharāṇa*, MS written in Patan in 1561, NGMPP reel No. E 167/37
 - *Jalandharāsuravadha*, written under Purandarasiṃha (1560-1597) of Patan, NGMPP reel No. E 460/33
 - *Kāśīvijaya* by Rāmacandra under Trailokyamalla and Tribhuvanamalla (1561-1613) of Bhaktapur, MS from 1597, NGMPP reel No. A 345/10
 - *Vidyāvilāpa* or *Vidyāvinoda*, written under Trailokyamalla and Tribhuvanamalla (1561-1613) of Bhaktapur, NGMPP reel No. B 276/16 (first part) and G 129/4
 - *Kṣṇacaritra*, written under Śivasiṃha (1597-1619) of Patan, NGMPP reel No. E 460/33

¹² The *Muditakuvalayāśvanāṭaka* was edited by Bijitakumāra Datta in his *Pracīna Bāṅgālā-Maithilī Nāṭaka*, Bardhamāna 1980, pp. 101-225 (although ascribed to Vaṃśamaṇi); cf. also

/Kuñjavihārī - nāṭaka the date of which is unknown.¹⁴

- A collection of Maithili songs with the title of *Daśāvātāranṛtya* is from the year 1625.¹⁵

- Moreover, I detected portions of another drama with a certain Daṇḍapāṇi as the central figure in one manuscript.¹⁶

- And finally, there seems to exist another Maithili drama written by Jagajjyotirmalla with the title of *Nalacarita* which is mentioned in the catalogue of the National Archives of Kathmandu.¹⁷ Jagajjyotirmalla worked intimately together with a Maithili Pandit named Vaṃśamaṇi who, on the one hand, contributed the so-called *rājavarṇanās* and *deśavarṇanās* to the introductory scenes of Jagajjyotirmalla's dramas and, on the other hand, made himself a name by literary works of his own.¹⁸ We do not know exactly to what extent this Maithili Pandit was the prime mover behind the innovative efforts of the king towards Maithili as the literary court language. We can only speculate that he may have had a considerable influence on the king. This is to be kept in mind when I, strictly following the documentary evidence, ascribe the innovations to the king himself. What interests me is the question as to the motives which may have led Jagajjyotirmalla to dismiss the courtly tradition by introducing Maithili as the preferred literary language. His personal relations to the Maithili Pandit may have been a factor, but there must have existed objective or factual considerations as well which, in principle, may either be of internally literary character or may have been induced by extra-literary circumstances. To start with let us reconsider once again the afore-mentioned arguments offered by W.L. Smith concerning the use of Maithili in the neighbouring countries of

R. Pischel in the *Katalog der Bibliothek der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, vol. 2, Leipzig 1881, pp. 7-10.

¹³ *Haragaurīvivāhanāṭaka*, ed. by Dr. Rāmadev Jhā, Darbhāṅgā, Mithila Research Society 1970; a MS of the songs of this play has been filmed under the reel No. C 120/8 (title: *Gaurīvivāhakumārotṭatti [-nāṭaka]*)

¹⁴ *Kuñjavihārīnāṭaka*, ed. by Prabodha Chandra Bagchi, in: *Paricaya* (Bengali monthly), Calcutta baṅgābda 1347 (A. D. 1939/40); a palm-leaf MS of the songs only (giving the title of the play as *Śrīkuñjavihāra-nāmanāṭaka*) has been filmed by the NGMPP under the reel No. B 15/5.

¹⁵ Cf. D. R. Regmi: *Medieval Nepal*, part II, Calcutta 1966, p. 216, and Jayakanta Mishra, *History of Maithili Literature*, New Delhi 1976, p. 134 ("his best work"); MSS of the *Daśāvātāranṛtya* have been filmed by the NGMPP under the reel No. B 285/23 and 28. E 311/16 and G 72/9.

¹⁶ The title of that play may be *Daṇḍapāṇiyutṭatti[-nāṭaka]* which is mentioned in a MS filmed by the NGMPP under the reel No. B 287/12 (first part).

¹⁷ The MS is mentioned in the *Nāṭakasūcī* (V. S. 2031, No. 83kha) of the National Archives of Kathmandu and has probably been filmed by the NGMPP under the reel No. A 1026/9, though I have not been able to check it as yet.

¹⁸ H. P. Śāstrī in his *Catalogue of Palm-Leaf and Selected Paper MSS belonging to the Durbar Library Nepal*, vol. I, Calcutta 1905, mentions MSS of three different works of Vaṃśamaṇi (pp. XXXVI f., 13, 51, 168 f. and 103-105).

Bengal and Assam, but now with respect to Nepal and more specifically to the introduction of Maithili by or under Jagajjyotirmalla.

First of all the argument of an extraordinary mellifluousness of Old Maithili and therefore a particular aptitude for literary purposes seems to be somewhat precarious because of its basically subjective and valuing character. I do not know of any explicit remark in the Nepalese documents of that time and therefore neither dare to confirm nor to contest the argument. There was perhaps a general opinion such as this in the countries neighbouring Mithila, including Nepal, which possibly played a role in Jagajjyotirmalla's predilection for the Maithili language.

More important may have been the high prestige of Maithili as the language of a very famous literary tradition. As was said before, Jagajjyotirmalla was an educated scholar and poet, and so he was well-versed in the *nāṭaka* and *saṃgīta* traditions. Thus it could perhaps be assumed that he had the intention of continuing the tradition of Maithili literature and specifically of Maithili dramas in Nepal as well. In fact, among the altogether 40 songs¹⁹ of the *Haragaurīvivāhanāṭaka*, only about half were written by Jagajjyotirmalla himself or by his courtier Vaṃśamaṇi,²⁰ respectively, while all the other songs have been taken over from the Maithili tradition, among them seven songs written by Vidyāpati. As a matter of fact, in the other dramas by Jagajjyotirmalla I know of, all the songs are his own. And as for the outer form of his dramas it is conspicuous that Jagajjyotirmalla did not at all follow the model of the older dramas known from Mithila or Assam, but rather took over more or less exactly in his dramas the specifically Nepalese patterns of the older dramas written in Bengali, so that the innovation was confined exclusively to a change of the language used for the same dramatic form. From this I conclude that it was not the famous tradition of Maithili literature the royal author primarily intended to introduce into Nepal, but rather he wanted to continue the specific Nepalese drama with a new accent, i. e. written in Maithili instead of Bengali. Finally, we have to consider Smith's third argument, i. e. the religious one: Among Jagajjyotirmalla's dramas there is only one with a very particular connection to Kṛṣṇaism, namely the *Kuñjavihāranāṭaka*. Unfortunately its date is unknown. It is not impossible that this was the king's first Maithili production, and in this case the religious argument that the author wanted to use the traditionally favourite language for the theme would be undeniable. However, as I said, we do not know the time of composition of the Kṛṣṇaite drama. In addition, we must bear in mind the fact that exactly half of the plots of the six older Nepalese dramas in Bengali belong to the Kṛṣṇaite mythological cycle. Thus, there already existed a Nepalese tradition of dealing with Kṛṣṇaite themes in Bengali. Finally, we learn from the whole of the works written by Jagajjyotirmalla that he personally was not a decided devotee of Kṛṣṇa, rather in accordance with his family

¹⁹ The names of the respective authors of the songs are given in the Bhaṇitās.

²⁰ He wrote the usual two songs of the introductory scene about the king (*rājavarṇanā* on Jagajjyotirmalla) and the country (*deśavarṇanā* on the Bhaktapur kingdom).

tradition he was a follower of the Supreme Goddess, Parameśvarī or particularly called Talejū, though this, of course, does not at all exclude a veneration of Kṛṣṇa as well.

The arguments mentioned so far may all have contributed to the introduction of Maithili as the new literary court language, but there is still another argument which, in my opinion, is to be seen as the main motive of the Bhaktapur king for that innovation. This belongs to the field of politics. In order to specify this it is necessary to once again look back at the early history of the Malla Dynasty in the Nepal Valley.

In this connection, I can refer to an earlier study of mine. In 1991 I published an article on "The Descent of the Nepalese Malla Dynasty as Reflected by Local Chroniclers".²¹ Briefly summarized, the contents are the following: The ancestry of the first Malla king Sthitirājamalla was left out in a contemporary chronicle²² and, as it seems, was concealed deliberately. Later generations of Malla kings, however, felt embarrassed about this absence of any knowledge of their own genealogical origin - the more so as their claim to the throne was based on an hereditary title. In order to delete the blemish they traced their lineage back to the older, well-known Karṇāṭa Dynasty of Mithila. One of the main results of my studies at that time was the observation that this genealogical derivation was verified by documentary evidence for the 17th century only. In fact, the first author in the work of whom we find the new genealogy and who may well have been the creator of it was again the learned Bhaktapur king Jagajjyotirmalla. To be more exact, two genealogical documents of his have been handed down to us:

- in a manuscript from the year 1614 A.D. the king traced his family back six generations to Yaṅṣamalla, i. e. the grandson of Sthitirājamalla;

- later on, however, the same king in his Maithili drama *Muditakuvalayāśva-nāṭaka* from the year 1628 A.D. ventured far beyond this earlier genealogical text by tracing his family back to Sthitirājamalla and further back to the Karṇāṭas of Mithila. The motive of this genealogical derivation is quite clear: as was said before, the claim to power of the Malla dynasty was based on a hereditary title. That is why there was the need of tracing his own family back to notable and noble ancestors and, finally, if possible, even to one of the main mythological races of the Sūryavaṃśa or the Somavaṃśa. Concerning this last matter, however, the royal scholar was mistaken: in accordance with the Malla tradition he traced his own family, and by doing so also the Karṇāṭas, back to the Sūryavaṃśa. We know, however, from an inscription of Mithila that the Karṇāṭas themselves traced their own lineage back to the Somavaṃśa!

²¹ Journal of the American Oriental Society 111, 1991, pp. 118-122

²² The *Gopālarājavamaśāvalī*, ed. by Dhanavajra Vajrācārya and Kamal P. Malla, Wiesbaden 1985 (Nepal Research Centre Publications No. 9)

- To put it briefly: Jagajjyotirmalla's tracing back of the Malla family to the Karnāṭa line was obviously a calculated political act in order to consolidate the claim to power of his own royal dynasty - as it were, a claim from time immemorial.

At that time I did not think at all of the present theme of the introduction of Maithili as a literary language in Nepal, but from my present view it seems reasonable to see a connection between the two innovations by Jagajjyotirmalla: The - less historical than political - new genealogy, documented for the first time for Jagajjyotirmalla coincided with the afore-mentioned first use of Maithili instead of Bengali in the literary works of the same royal author. On the basis of this correspondence it does not seem to be too far-fetched to construct a connection between these two deeds and to interpret the introduction of the Maithili language as mainly politically motivated as well. In that case the double innovator would not only have traced his own family back to Mithila as its land of origin, but would also have undertaken to consolidate this affiliation to Mithila by literary means, i. e. by using Maithili for the first time in his dramatic productions. In the following period the example of Jagajjyotirmalla's literary production probably turned out to be even more successful than the royal author himself may have expected. While we do not have any hints from the above-mentioned Bengali dramas written before Jagajjyotirmalla's time that Malla kings were involved in dramatic production, it was this Bhaktapur king who founded a sort of a new family tradition: almost all succeeding kings of the Malla dynasty, not only from Bhaktapur, but from Patan and Kathmandu as well, took an active part in the literary and particularly dramatic productions of their times. This may once again underline the interpretation that these literary activities were basically politically motivated. Obviously it became the fashion or even part of the royal duties for a Malla king to participate in literary activities and to strive for a certain degree of literary reputation. The festivals of the calendar were to be celebrated with dramatic performances of pieces which ought to be fresh from the hand of the present king. The dramatic production in Nepal of that time thus became more or less a matter of political calculation. Malla kings had to be creative not apart from and independent of their main political obligations - so to say done in their spare time as a hobby-, but as a part of their official duties in order to underline their claim to power. Literary activity served the purpose of justifying and consolidating the supremacy of a dynasty which proudly claimed to be of foreign origin. Nevertheless, what was said before about Jagajjyotirmalla also holds true for his successors to the throne: they all stereotypically kept to the traditional form of dramas particularly developed beforehand in Nepal; thus their intention was less to implant there anything of foreign origin, but rather to find a sort of synthesis by connecting the specific Nepalese tradition with their own identity.

As was to be expected the Malla kings of the Bhaktapur line after Jagajjyotirmalla followed his example in a comparatively higher degree than the neighbouring kings of Patan and Kathmandu, and among the Bhaktapur kings there was even a continually increasing engagement in the field of

literary activities. Only from Jagajjyotirmalla's son Nareśamalla, whose reign lasted for a mere five years do we not know of any dramas. From his grandson Jagatprakāśamalla and great-grandson Jitāmitramalla we know of more than ten dramas each and from the latter's son and grandson, the two last kings in Bhaktapur before the Gorkha invasion, of even more than thirty dramas each.²³ Likewise the genealogy of the Malla dynasty, which was probably founded by Jagajjyotirmalla, was repeated exactly in one drama each of Jagatprakāśamalla and Jitāmitramalla,²⁴ and these two royal authors wrote their dramas to a large extent in the Maithili language.

In the two other kingdoms, Patan and Kathmandu, Jagajjyotirmalla's new genealogy was only accepted with a certain hesitation, as we know from four stone inscriptions from 1637 to 1658 altogether.²⁵ And with a similar reserve the neighbouring Malla kings adapted the literary innovation to replace Bengali with Maithili. From Patan in the time of the two Patan kings Siddhinarasiṃhamalla (1619-61) and Śrīnivāsamalla (1661-84) several Bengali as well as Maithili dramas have been handed down side by side.²⁶ The situation in Kathmandu was a bit different. According to the testimony of a Maithili drama²⁷ written by Vaṃśamaṇi in 1655 under the Kathmandu king Pratāpamalla (1641-1674), that Maithila Pandit seems to have had changed courts, probably after Jagajjyotirmalla's death, and from that Kathmandu king we know of quite a number of literary Maithili texts in the form of inscriptions and manuscripts.²⁸ Besides the generally observable tendency to use Maithili for literary purposes there is another noticeable trend among the Malla kings of the latest phase, i.e. not to write any longer in only one language, but to give themselves the air of multilingual authors. Thus single dramas in other languages were also written by the Malla kings of Patan and Kathmandu, and partly also by the Bhaktapur kings. There were:

- dramas in the indigenous Newari language, particularly by Jagajjyotirmalla's grandson Jagatprakāśamalla, who towards the end of his lifetime switched more and more over to Newari,²⁹ while his successors used Newari only occasionally

²³ Particularly for the literary works of Jagatprakāśamalla see my edition of Jagatprakāśamalla's *Mūladevaśaśidevavyākhyānāṭaka*, Wiesbaden 1987, pp. 10-17; the numbers of dramas I give for the three successors to the throne in Bhaktapur, Jitāmitramalla, Bhūpatīndramalla and Ranajīmalla, are based on my own hand-written notes taken from the (preliminary) catalogue of the NGMPP.

²⁴ For references see my above-mentioned JAOS article p. 121, esp. notes 12 and 13.

²⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, note 14

²⁶ I know of eight dramas written in Patan under Siddhinarasiṃhamalla; two of them have been edited: for the *Harīścandraṅṅṛtya* (which is partly in Maithili, partly in Bengali) cf. note 5 above, and the Bengali play *Gopācandraṅṅṛtya* edited by Tarapada Mukherji, Calcutta 1970. For Śrīnivāsamalla I have noted seven titles of dramas.

²⁷ Cf. *Bhḥatsūcīpatra* of the National Archives of Kathmandu, vol. 3: *Nāṭaka*, Kathmandu V. S. 2019 (1962/63), pp. 16-17

²⁸ Cf. Jayakanta Mishra: *History of Maithili Literature*, New Delhi 1976, p. 116 and 137-138

²⁹ Cf. the introduction of my edition of Jagatprakāśamalla's *Mūladevaśaśidevavyākhyānāṭaka* (Stuttgart 1987), pp. 14-15

- especially Kṛṣṇa dramas in Braj Bhāṣā, the Hindi dialect of the Kṛṣṇa homeland around Mathura,³⁰ - and even single dramas once again in Sanskrit,³¹ though the language of these dramas appears grammatically rather non-Sanskritic and thus reveals that the authors thought in a New Indo-Aryan language and transferred this word-for-word into Sanskrit.

This last observation may be taken as a symptom for the relatively low literary standard of the majority of the dramatic productions by the late Malla kings, although in this judgement we have to take into consideration the specific nature of these Nepalese dramas. As we can see from the dramatic texts themselves and as is also confirmed by the independent report of a foreign eyewitness, it was not the dramatic dialogues, but the dancing and the songs which were in the foreground of the dramatic performances, so that we have to read the manuscripts more as a sort of opera-libretti than as literary dramas in the sense of the Occidental or even of the Old-Indian tradition of dramatic writing. The foreign eyewitness just mentioned was Father Cassien, a Capuchin who passed through Kathmandu on his way to Tibet in the 1740s, and who left an interesting description of the performance of Nepalese plays. He wrote:

“The people of the country have the custom, at their festivals, of representing a story drawn from one of their sacred books or a satirical comedy ... The actors of these comedies have very little recitative and much action, so that the principal actor does not recite eight or ten phrases in the different scenes in a comedy lasting two or three hours; but it is the choruses, which sing the whole as in the Greek comedies. In each comedy, the Nepalese have at least two choruses, and the third is formed by the full chorus - that is to say by the two choruses together. For instance the actor expresses the extreme sadness of his plight in two or three verses which he recites. The choruses in alternation sing mournfully of the bitterness of his sorrow ... And at the same time as the chorus is singing, the actor, who dances constantly, fits the movements of his face, his feet and his hands to the meaning of the words they are singing. The orchestra for these comedies is composed of a few small drums, of trumpets and of an instrument formed by two small cymbals which are struck one against the other ... The lead is given by the drum, and it is beaten with the hand.”³²

This report based on first-hand observation fits exactly in all its details the

³⁰ Presently I know of ten Nepalese dramas in Braj Bhāṣā among which two *Pārijātaharaṇa* plays of Jagatprakāśamalla and of his contemporary in Patan, Śrīnivāsamalla are the oldest.

³¹ Jagajjyotirmalla's great-grandson Jitāmitramalla wrote a *Jaiminibhāratannāṭaka* in Sanskrit (NGMPP:A 346/3 and 8) as did the latter's son Bhūpatīndramalla (B 275/5).

³² Taken from Kamal L. P. Malla: *Classical Newari Literature: A. Sketch*, Kathmandu 1982, pp. 75-76.

texts and directions given in the manuscripts of the dramas of that time. In fact, the dialogue scenes therein are normally rather scanty and often give the impression of just serving as a sort of framework for the evidently central numerous songs. Since the plots of the dramas in many cases were taken from the well-known traditional stock of mythological and legendary stories, it may not have been the main concern of the authors to make sure that the contents of the short dialogues or of the songs were understood in all details by the public. What seems to have counted was mainly the artistic skill of the dancing and singing actors that determined the grade of entertainment and with that the attraction of the plays. Thus the pre-eminence of the Nepalese Malla kings in the field of literature was perhaps more a matter of their political power than of their poetical skill as royal authors.

Nevertheless, this concept was quite successful. The high share of contribution of dramas written by members of the late Malla dynasty which have been handed down to us at any rate give the impression that the Malla kings managed to be seen by the public as prominently contributing to the cultural achievements of their time.